DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 139 470 JC 770 291

AUTHOR	Berg, Rodney
TITLE	Myths and Facts on Community Colleges.
PUB DATE	6 May 77
NOTE	10p.; Paper presented at the Illinois Community College Presidents' Workshop (St. Charles, Illinois, May 5-7, 1977)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Changing Attitudes; College Role; Community Colleges; Conformity; *Educational Change; Educational Innovation; *Educational Problems; Futures (of Society); *Junior Colleges

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews several problems currently facing community colleges which threaten to diminish their vitality. The notion that the community college needs to be a "full partner in higher education" is detracting from acceptance of the community college's unique role. Student-centeredness seems to be giving way to faculty- and staff-centeredness. Fiscal exigencies are causing the community college to glory in its past rather than to forge ahead with imagination. Coordination, regionalizing, the meeting of state standards, and raises in tuition are debunking the myth that the community college is a low-cost, near-at-home people's college. Yet, despite these and other problems, there are exemplary activities occurring on every community college campus which prove that the community college is still healthy and moving, and that, in an evolving way, it will adjust to current difficulties. (JDS)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED139470

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

MYTHS AND FACTS ON COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

Rodney Berg
President, College of DuPage

Paper presented at the Illinois Community College Presidents' Workshop (St. Charles, Ill., May 5-7, 1977)

JC 770 291

Council of President's Workshop - May 5-7, 1977

The invitation to participate in this workshop with some remarks on my perceptions as to the perceived and real role of the community college in the 1970's at first pleased me greatly and then later struck within me a feeling of terror. Eleven years of intensive concern for bringing out of the cornfields in southern Glen Ellyn a vibrant and pulsating organism called the College of DuPage has occupied my time with a great many activities more mundane than the heady opportunity of viewing from afar the phenomena of community colleges in the great state of Illinois and elsewhere. I am sure this is also true of some of you.

There is a quip going around my campus to the effect that the president of the College, the chairman of the Board of Trustees and the state director of Community Colleges were pushed (or fell) from the 30th floor of a Chicago building, with predicted results. To the question, do you know what happened? comes the answer -- who cares? Perhaps we should care that the miracle of the past fifty years sometimes looks like the mirage of the next fifty. On my campus we have an administrative officer in planning who has gained the name "F and F" - which means in our language, Fact of Fancy? It is appropriate that we as administrators of Illinois Community colleges should take this time out to think in terms of the myth and the realities of the community college program, particularly as it applies in Illinois.

Let me first make this observation. The Community College Act of 1965 is a good act. Master Plan One for Higher Education in Illinois is a thoughtful document that properly put into perspective the role of the community colleges as versus that of four-year colleges in this state. A principle of shared governance made it possible for local boards and reasonable administrators to assume full responsibility for meeting certain unmet needs for higher education

within the confines of a geographical area and to be supported by the state in fiscal responsibility as well as appropriate leadership and coordination. It is, of course, no surprise that energetic people on both sides of this shared arrangement have been militant in seeking adequate expression of prerogatives. This condition, however, has led to an inordinate amount of activity on the part of presidents in month to month concerns. Karl Jacobs of Rock Valley College has said that the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents have been tracked as a 'boiler-plate, hands-on' organization. Oscar Shabat of Chicago has referred to the organization as a debating society and chooses to have nothing to do with it. Others in the state have referred to the presidents as cry-babies because we seem to be forever involved in protecting our turf. But protect our turf is what we have had to do if the spirit and the vision of those who brought into being the Act of 1965 is to be preserved.

It is right then, at this time, that we turn our attention to those kinds of matters that are appropriate to our leadership role.

From the many pronouncements and perceptions extant relating to the role and function of the community college, let me select just a few for comment.

Myth - The community college is full partner with higher education and should share in all the rights and privileges of our sister four-year institutions. At the risk of arousing the complete hostility of my peers, let me say that I have listened again and again to this statement or others similar to it with complete amazement. In my view this need to be "full partner in higher education" is the very genesis of most of our problems. We are not a university, even though we have some of the characteristics of the university. We are not a glorified upper level secondary school, even though we have some of the marks of secondary schools. The fact is that we have a foot in each of these camps and we ride Roman style to a completely different identity. We have talked

about this identity endlessly, written about it and read about it, yet when the chips are down, we envy the university president and his perquisites. We struggle with the legislature over our fair share (usually meaning one for one or close to it) of the state dollar. Our faculties want to be professors and associate professors. We long for the isolation of the university campus from a hostile or at best an apathetic community. We look upon the mountain top and find it good. But our mission is in the swamps and the byways. Small wonder that our university colleagues look upon us with a form of contempt when we are not even about the business of explaining our role in education beyond the high school. Small wonder that we cannot pass rate referendums in our several districts when our community sees us (through our eyes) as second-class higher education institutions. Small wonder that our students see us as glorified high schools when we fail to identify our particular role in reference to their on-going career and life goals. It is my firm belief that when we accept the role of a community college and glory in it rather than yearning for the self-deluding full partner role with the university that we will see our colleges for what they really are -- a truly significant force in the lives of the citizens of our communities, a role which has barely been identified but is the escutcheon of our reason for being.

(2) Myth - The community college is a student centered - guidance centered - teaching centered institution. These words so vividly describing what we thought we ought to be, seem on my campus at least, to be paling into insignificance. Meeting student needs seems to have given away to meeting "my" needs. I am hearing more and more about shortening of the academic year; teaching four days a week (or less); having "my" schedule between 9 and 12 a.m.; reluctance to identify hours when "I" will be in my office so the students may contact me

for assistance or guidance. Courses and curriculums are built for head count rather than head content. At one time on our campus, all professional staff (starting with me) were required to be involved with the advisement of students as to their educational and personal needs. Through a subtle shift of policies and welfare concerns, this has given away to a perfunctory involvement, if at all. Services have been established (or atomized, as Karl Jacobs so colorfully calls it) and have separated the community college professional from his logical involvement with the well-being of students. We have moved from the beautiful personal student relationship with the instructor to the more impersonal relationship of counseling by appointment. Teachers long to be professors, and as professors they wish to teach less and teaching less they wish to be involved more in non-teaching activities. The instruction of students in basics, which is a part of our mission, has diminished and we are prone to develop personally satisfying courses such as the political implication of Belshazzar's Feast or the Life and Times of the Tsetse Fly between 1896 and 1898.

(3) Myth - The community college is a future oriented, community oriented institution. Having come from nowhere to somewhere in the past seventy-five years, the community college has electrified all of the world with its ability to cope with the future. It met head-on needs of the community and moved swiftly to speak to those needs. The institution has been copied around the world as the model of a people's college. Sad to say the community colleges appear to be ossifying. As we retreat within ourselves to our own needs and our own concerns and as we build bureaucracies both locally and in the state, we seem less and less able to maintain the momentum that brought a measure of political reinforcement. Arthur Cohen, who is with us today, said in Dateline 79

that resources would be harder to come by in 1980. Other writers held out the encouragement that only our imagination would limit our ability to carry out our mission. Sadly, it appears that the worry and the woe of adequate cash flow is rapidly diminishing our willingness to serve and to use that imagination. Rather than use the telescope, we are looking into the looking glass and see not the future in terms of service to our community but in the reflection of what we have been. A trustee at my college recently stunned me with the remark that he had not recently been asked to consider items of excitement of the nature he had previously reviewed. Instead we, like most of my colleagues, are forced to the looking glass. We were caught in budget and state regulations and federal government involvement and tax revolts, frightened boards and irate citizens. We have exchanged our star gazing for grubbing. I think we <u>really know</u> why the politicians seem to have abandoned us, why our public is more critical, why our students are more apathetic, why our faculty is more complacent. We have abandoned the vision and have become pedestrian.

(4) <u>Myth</u> - <u>We are a low cost, near-at-home people's college.</u> The fact is, that we have permitted and allowed a militant state Board staff (and I am speaking of Illinois but suspect that it may be true elsewhere) to bind us with chains. We have become or are becoming a state system. We are conforming. <u>This</u> is the true meaning of coordinated. We are regionalizing. In the name of coordination we are determining where programs should be so that they might be less costly or more efficient by <u>state</u> standards rather than local needs. Already, students desiring a certain program may find it necessary to travel to, or even live in another district in order to get that program. People's college? I don't see it that way. Low cost? Higher tuitions and travel cost are saying otherwise. We are less a people's college and we are rapidly

losing that enviable distinction. We are a state system, tied in to university requirements and state-wide regionalization and coordination. Our responsiveness to local needs for quality low cost programs is disappearing.

I am tempted to speak to another myth - the Myth of Comprehensiveness. We think we can be all things to all people. But perhaps this myth is more appropriately spoken to at another time.

But this gloomy picture I have painted need not be. There are, of course, on every campus, exemplary activities that are very much within the accepted role and function of the community college. Since this paper is not a scholarly report, let me just indicate a few activities we at DuPage are involved with as a demonstration of that. While I am tempted to say that College of DuPage is the number one college in the United States, I am quite convinced we are one of many number one's.

In the Fall of 1976 at a faculty assembly, I called for a convocation for the preparation of the 21st century curriculum. The call was answered and plans are under way for a series of activities to take place during anywhere from six to twenty-four months in which we will attempt to relate the college to its community in such a way as to evolve what we hope will be the reasonable educational function of the college in the year 2000 and forward. A person of national reputation whose name has been mentioned here today, has been contacted and has enthusiastically agreed to work with us on a continuing basis as we involve both staff and community in this vital exercise.

A program called S.E.E.D. which means the Study for the Expanded Educational Development of the College of DuPage is progressing, slowly, somewhat timidly but steadily and is primarily concerned with those students whose total, formal education will be obtained upon our campus. It is controversial in nature and more so in its publicity, yet we have our eyes to the future as we proceed with it.

Our Learning Resources Center has entered into cooperative arrangements with all of the libraries, some thirty-five of them, in the district in mutual endeavors and mutual services.

Through our Extension activity we take classes to many locations (over fifty different teaching stations) in our district to meet the specific learning needs of people as identified by them.

Last week I attended the kick-off for a workshop of administrators and counselors of the high schools for the purpose of expanding the base of information about the college and entering into a program called Learning on a Continuum.

Under the prosaic name of differentiated staffing, our faculty is deep into exploring better uses of resources for increased services to students at lower costs.

A new unit called Alternative Learning Services is soon to be launched. This unit will encompass activities ranging from developmental learning to independent studies.

Alpha is a program on our campus that places students in a wide range of activities from involvement with urban studies in Chicago (a live-in experience) to travels in the Smokies;in biological studies that include encounters in the Everglades and gulf coast marine biology. This program is unfortunately financed by the students and not by state or local monies which marks in my view a severe deficiency in its applicability to all students.

Discover is an imaginative approach to the use of the computer in career counseling and teaching. The program is cooperatively developed by College of DuPage and the University of Western Maryland.

Special programs for Latinos are being conducted in the home areas of Latinos in our district.

A re-shifting of our thoughts about student activities and student government has resulted in a wholesale increase in the volume of student involvement with student life opportunities.

And the list goes on, but it is a short list and I am sure that the list on your campus is much longer. So, despite my gloomy observations early in this discussion, I must presume that the community college is healthy and moving and that in an evolving way, we will adjust to what appear to be current difficulties.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak -- I am sure this discussion period will give us opportunity for amplification.

Rodney Berg
President
College of DuPage

mjt
5-6-77

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES
CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES